

Briefing:

SB 229 - Tanana Valley State Forest changes

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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December 12, 2007

DIVISION OF FORESTRY

Background. The 2001 update to the TVSF Management Plan recommended a package of changes to the boundaries of the State Forest. As a part of that package, the plan recommends some of the deletions from the State Forest to be added to the Minto State Game Refuge. These proposals were thoroughly reviewed by the public and agencies during the planning process, and the proposals in the final plan were non-controversial. There were no comments on these proposals during the final comment period.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONS TO THE TANANA VALLEY STATE FOREST: Amend AS 41.17.400(d)

Alaska Statutes Section 41.17.210 states that State Forest proposals shall consist "primarily of commercially valuable forest land determined by the governor to be necessary for retention in State ownership for management under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield..." Almost all of the 1.78 million acres in the Tanana Valley State Forest is commercially valuable forest land. Some State lands adjacent to the State Forest, however, contain valuable forest resources that would benefit the State Forest by their addition to that legislatively designated area. The lands listed in the following packet, and shown on the accompanying map, are recommended for addition to the State Forest. They total approximately 101,610 acres.

The lands recommended for addition to the State Forest contain high-value commercial forest lands, many of which are easily accessible. Most are already classified Forestry under the Tanana Basin Area Plan, and all are compatible with the intent of the State Forest. Some have been harvested historically, and some provide access to other lands within the State Forest. Some of the smaller parcels are isolated pieces of State land adjacent to the State Forest. Adding them to the State Forest would add to the value of the State Forest and consolidate management authority in these areas.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELETIONS FROM THE TANANA VALLEY STATE FOREST: Amend AS 41.17.400(d)

The Tanana Valley State Forest contains approximately 66,218 acres of land that do not contain valuable forest resources. On the basis of the statutory criteria in the previous section, DNR recommends several deletions from the Tanana Valley State Forest. Some of the lands are wetlands adjacent to the Minto Flats State Game Refuge that contain no commercially valuable timberland. Another area recommended for deletion contains the shorelands of the Chatanika River, an extremely high value recreation area. The other lands on the deletion list consist of two townships: one comprised of wetlands and the other made up of high-elevation, unforested lands.

C. ADDITIONS TO THE MINTO FLATS STATE GAME REFUGE OF LANDS RECOMMENDED FOR DELETION FROM THE TANANA VALLEY STATE FOREST: Amend AS 16.20.037(a).

Three parcels of land within the TVSF containing wetlands adjacent to the Minto Flats State Game Refuge are recommended to be withdrawn from the State Forest and added to the Refuge. They do not contain commercially valuable forest land, and would be better managed as part of the Refuge. They total 4,298 acres.

List of proposed additions to the Tanana Valley State Forest

The following list summarizes the recommended additions to the State Forest (a total of approximately 101,610 acres):

1. This strip of land, located between Minto Flats and the adjacent State Forest, contains productive upland forests of white spruce and hardwoods. The unit is presently accessed by the Dunbar-Livengood winter trail and will be accessed by an all-season forest road. (4,480 acres within T1N R6W F.M.)

2. These units are on Nenana Ridge, border the State Forest, and have similar values. They are highly productive, easily accessible, upland forests. Adding these units to the State Forest will consolidate the State's highest value forest lands under a single management authority and plan. (14,568 acres within T2S R4W, T2S R5W, and T3S R5W F.M.)

Note: If this subunit is added to the State Forest, the following management guidelines will be added to the entire Subunit 5A. "A 300-foot buffer from centerline on each side of the roadway should be managed to maintain or enhance scenic views along the highway. Development activities such as timber harvesting and land-use authorizations may be allowed within this buffer if the activity is designed to maintain or enhance the scenic values of the highway corridor, and to provide opportunities for viewing background scenery."

3. This unit has several parcels which comprise the bulk of the timberland occurring between Fort Greely and the Tanana River. The timber consists of productive white spruce stands along the Tanana River and mixed white spruce/hardwood stands on uplands to the South. Management goals would emphasize the area's wildlife, recreation, and timber resources. Because of habitat values in the floodplain, the recommended additions to the State Forest are south of the 1000-foot contour line from the Tanana River. (21,189 acres, within T7S R6E, T7S R7E, T7S R8E, T8S R5E, T8S R6E, T8S R7E, and T8S R8E F.M.)

4. This quarter-section lies adjacent to the Tanana Valley State Forest Subunit 10B, the Volkmar Bluffs Research Natural Area (RNA), and is managed as part of the RNA. It encompasses part of the large prairie feature in the RNA. This amendment is designed to consolidate management of the RNA within the State Forest. (160 acres within T9S R13E F.M.)

5. This unit consists of several small parcels of land near Dot Lake that were not included in the State Forest because of questionable land status. The primary purpose of adding these to the State Forest is to consolidate land management in the area. (9,600 acres within T21N R8E, T22N R8E, T23N R6E, and T23N R7E C.R.M.)

6. These block is located along the Tanana River near Tok between Native lands and the State Forest. The units contain commercial timber, have good access, and would be

valuable additions to the State Forest. (23,033 acres within T18N R13E, T19N R12E, and T19N R13E C.R.M.)

7. This small parcel north of Tanacross was excluded in the legal description of the TVSF because of federal interest. However, the federal interest is no longer valid. (40 acres within T20N R11E C.R.M.)

8. These three parcels of land are located near Dot Lake between Native lands and the State Forest. Their addition to the State Forest will consolidate management authority. (5,600 acres within T21N R8E and T23N R6E C.R.M.)

9. This township, north of Dot Lake, was left out of the TVSF legislation by a mistake in a legal description that substituted a wrong township. Although the unit is currently inaccessible, including it in the State Forest as originally proposed would offer some management efficiency because it shares common access and similar resource values with adjoining State Forest lands to the west and south. (23,040 acres, T25N R7E C.R.M.)

List of proposed deletions from the State Forest

The following list summarizes the recommended withdrawals (a total of approximately 66,071 acres):

1. TVSF Subunit 1C: 1,898 acres within T1N R11W and T2N R11W F.M.

These two parcels of the Minto Flats along the Tolovana River are recommended for withdrawal so as to consolidate most wetlands in Minto Flats under a single management intent. The areas are highly productive wildlife habitat but contain very little timberland. The area borders the Minto Flats State Game Refuge, and is recommended as an addition to the Refuge.

2. TVSF Subunit 3B: 2,400 acres within T4N R7W F.M.

This parcel consists of wetlands bordering the Minto Flats State Game Refuge. The area borders the Minto Flats State Game Refuge, and is recommended as an addition to the Refuge.

3. TVSF Subunit 4B: 2,400 acres within T3N R3W F.M.

This parcel contains shorelands of the Chatanika River. It is recommended as a TVSF withdrawal to be available for designation as part of the Chatanika State Recreation River corridor. In the interim it would be managed for public recreation and wildlife habitat as part of Tanana Basin Area Plan Subunit 1E1. The area is comprised mostly of poorly drained wetlands along the Chatanika River and contains little timberland.

4. TVSF Subunit 12A: 19,200 acres within T21N R10E C.R.M.

This township contains low relief and swampy, noncommercial forest; it was not included in the original administration proposal. The unit's inclusion in the State Forest does not offer any management advantages for adjacent State Forest lands. It would

become part of Tanana Basin Area Plan Subunit 6G1, which is designated for wildlife habitat and forestry.

5. TVSF Subunit 12A: 19,200 acres within T25N R8 C.R.M.

This township was apparently included in the State Forest because of a mistake made in the range. This unit is generally at a high elevation with few significant resources appropriate for the State Forest system. It would become part of Tanana Basin Area Plan Subunit 6J2 which is designated for resource management.

6. TVSF Subunit 13A, 13B: 21,120 acres within T19N R15E and T20N R13E C.R.M.

These two parcels were are underlain entirely by permafrost and forested with noncommercial black spruce. They have no other important resource values or advantages for inclusion in the State Forest. They would become part of Tanana Basin Area Plan Subunit 6J3 which is designated for wildlife habitat.

Additions to Minto State Game Refuge

1. TVSF Subunit 1C: 1,898 acres within T1N R11W and T2N R11W F.M.

These two parcels on the Minto Flats in TVSF Subunit 1C along the Tolovana River are recommended to be added to the Refuge. This change would consolidate most wetlands in Minto Flats under a single management intent. The areas are highly productive wildlife habitat but contain very little timberland. The area borders the Minto Flats State Game Refuge.

2. TVSF Subunit 3B: 2,400 acres within T4N R7W

This parcel consists of wetlands bordering the Minto Flats State Game Refuge.